DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 434 246 CE 079 252

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TITLE	Culturally Sensitive Career Assessment: A Quandary. ERIC Digest No. 210.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, OH.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-CE-99-210
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	4p.; Report number erroneously printed on digest as EDO-CE-99-211.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0013
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; *Career Counseling; Career Education; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Differences; *Cultural Pluralism; Cultural Relevance; *Culturally Relevant Education; Educational Trends; *Evaluation Methods; Secondary Education; Test Bias; Test Reliability; Test Validity; Trend Analysis; *Vocational Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS	Career Assessment; *Career Assessment Instruments; ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Multicultural perspectives on assessment challenge traditional perspectives by advancing an additional source of variation in test responses that is presumed to escape test developers and test users. Increasing and convergent evidence from multiple sources indicates the following types of ethnocentric errors in test development, administration, and interpretation: misdiagnosis, labeling, inappropriate treatment planning, and erroneous conclusions about intervention effectiveness. In 1995, Sedlacek and Kim described four common errors in career assessment. Focus on multicultural assessment issues has since increased; however, the main focus has been on assessments of abilities and psychopathology. Career assessment has traditionally concentrated on assessment of the individual and has emphasized measurement of abilities, personality traits, interests, and various career theory constructs (maturity, indecision, self-efficacy). Reviews should be conducted of the major instruments available for classifying individuals in terms of abilities, personality traits, and vocational interests to determine their fairness to individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Attention to multicultural assessment in the area of typical performance is still in its "infancy" relative to the area of maximal performance, which is in its "adolescence." Test developers could profit from considering and implementing the concept of Sensitivity Review Guidelines and Principles, which are available on the World Wide Web. (Contains 28 references.) (MN)

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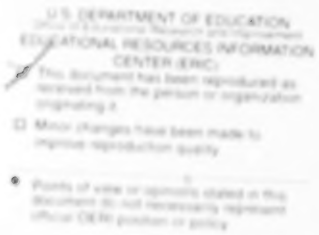
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EDO-CE-99-211

by James T. Austin

ERIC DIGEST No. 210

1999

Culturally Sensitive Career Assessment: A Quandary

The concept of culture looms large in the world these days. Although the term can be difficult to define (Triandis 1972, 1994), the essence of culture is a reminder to institutions and individuals that there are other "tribes" in the world. Their appearance, behavior, and customs are different, and sometimes vastly different. In the domains of working and schooling, cultural diversity has become an important concept and a source of leverage for those who dare to surf on turbulent waves that involve new ways of thinking and new ways of doing (Jackson et al. 1992). Just as it is encouraging to see general assessment competency checklists (Garfield and Prediger 1994), so it is heartening to see progress in the area of multicultural assessment. Among the signs of progress noted in the preparation of this digest are discussions of cultural competencies and standards for counselors (Paniagua 1998; Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis 1992; Sue et al. 1998); proposals for increasing understanding of cultural issues, both general (Bouthis, Moise, Perreault, and Senécal 1997; Locke 1998) and with respect to counseling (Lee 1999); and research-based considerations of the career development and vocational behavior of racial-ethnic minorities (Leong 1995).

Appropriate Assessment: What Has Been Done?

Multicultural perspectives challenge traditional perspectives on assessment by advancing an additional source of variation in test responses that is presumed to escape test developers and test users. The early work of Jane Mercer in assessment of abilities is exemplary in this regard, especially her development and defense of the System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment (SOMPA; Mercer, 1976, 1978-79, 1979). Marsella and Leong (1995) recently explicated linguistic, conceptual, scale, and normative aspects of measures as standards of equivalence. They used these terms to address the specificity and generality of personality and career assessments with respect to culture. Linguistic equivalence refers to the language and thus to the instructions and items of assessments. Conceptual equivalence refers to the meaning of the constructs that are assessed. Are the notions of work and career, for example, viewed similarly across cultures? Scale equivalence refers to the response formats, whether True-False or Likert or "thermometer"-type scales. Finally, normative equivalence refers to the existence of interpretive assistance for the interpreter of an assessment. Although costly to develop in terms of time and resources, norms for such cultural groups as Asian-Americans, African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Native-Americans provide indispensable aid to counselors who often originate from the cultural majority group.

A strong claim, for which there is increasing and convergent evidence from multiple sources (Sue 1996), is that ethnocentric errors occur in test development, administration, and interpretation. They range from misdiagnosis to labeling to inappropriate treatment planning to erroneous conclusions about intervention effectiveness. The quandary of the subtitle of this digest arises, as Janet Helms puts it in a 1997 chapter about ability assessment, because cultural equivalence is not considered or is considered to be unimportant. However, counselors are confronted with increasingly diverse individuals across colors and cultures. Holaday and Boucher (1998) investigated the trends in the *Journal of Personality Assessment* between 1937 and 1997 by coding each article in the first issue of each decade (a total of seven issues). A key finding was that only 6% of the participants in the studies were reported as African, Mexican, or Asian Americans. Given these observations, there exist many more questions than answers.

In the area of career assessment, for instance, what progress has been made since Sedlacek and Kim (1995) presented four common assessment errors and four suggestions for the improvement of multicultural assessment in career counseling? Have researchers and practitioners heeded Subich's recommendations (1994)? Has recognition of problems led to any attempts at solutions? Are constructs defined with cultural groups in mind? Are norms appropriate for diverse cultural groups? Are validation studies conducted with cultural groups represented or even in mind?

First, there is evidence of an increasing focus on multicultural assessment issues, although most of the attention has been focused on assessments of abilities and of psychopathology. Prediger (1993, 1994) compiled relevant standards from five source publications, deriving 34 points of guidance and organizing them into four assessment tasks: selection of instruments (content), selection of instruments (technical considerations), administration and scoring, and use/interpretation. Another notable development in this regard is the appearance of three recent edited books, by Sodowsky and Impara (1996), by Sandoval, Frisby, Geisinger, Ramos-Grenier, and Scheuneman (1998), and by Samuda (1998). Although comprehension of their chapters often requires assessment, statistical, and cultural expertise, all books are well worth reading. Sodowsky and Impara present revised papers first delivered at a Buros Institute Symposium and address a scientist-practitioner audience in counseling and clinical psychology. The book's sections address test bias and multicultural assessment theory, new developments in measuring white and black racial attitudes, and relationships of multicultural competencies and counselor training. Samuda's book, a publication of the American Psychological Association, focuses on issues of diversity associated with test interpretation, with chapters addressing perspectives on test interpretation, contexts for interpretation, dimensions of diversity, and future trends. It is encouraging that these books address the training of specialists to assess and counsel members of diverse groups (cf. Hinkle 1994).

Many resources, however, address career issues only tangentially. In career counseling, since the time of Parsons (1909), the interest of researchers and practitioners has been oriented toward three questions: assessment of individual capabilities and characteristics, assessment of occupational/organizational features, and match, fit, or linkage between the two sets. Research attempts to understand relationships among variables and practice attempts to use the results of research and experience to provide services to individuals, schools, and work organizations. Assessment in the career field concentrates upon the first of Parsons' questions, assessment of the individual, and emphasizes measurement of abilities, personality traits, interests, and various career theory constructs (e.g., maturity, indecision, self-efficacy). Interventions are largely based on the results of assessments, with counseling processes and outcomes following that lead.

What Else Should Be Done?

Reviews should be conducted of the major instruments available for classifying individuals in terms of abilities, personality traits, and vocational interests. The reviews should focus upon their consider-

ation and investigation of the four types of equivalence. In addition, measures of career decision making process and status (e.g., maturity, indecision, etc.) should be scrutinized in the same manner. Process studies of how counselors use assessment information in diagnosis, planning, and evaluation should assist in refining the training of culturally sensitive and capable counselors. The fourth edition of the leading set of assessment standards, issued jointly by the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education, is presently in press. To what extent were multicultural issues considered in the revision? Upon review of a draft version of the 15 chapters, it is clear that portions of the second part, four chapters on fairness in testing, pertain to cultural issues. They include a general treatment of fairness and bias in testing and treatments of the rights of test takers, effects of varying linguistic backgrounds on testing, and testing individuals with disabilities.

A summary of what has been done in the area of multicultural assessment reveals that although progress has been made, there is still much to do. Attention to multicultural assessment in the area of typical performance is in its "infancy" relative to the area of maximal performance, which is in its "adolescence." Test developers could profit from considering and implementing the concept of Sensitivity Review Guidelines and Principles, which are available on the World Wide Web (http://www.ets.org/fairness.html). For practitioners, it might be a useful exercise to reflect on how they themselves fit into the quadrants defined by Leong (1993). He crossed two levels of an appropriateness facet with two levels of a counseling goals/outcomes facet to yield a 2x2 matrix. There are two "consistent" cells—appropriate goals and process, inappropriate goals and process, and two "inconsistent" cells— inappropriate goals-appropriate process, appropriate goals-inappropriate process. Labels devised by Leong for these quadrants are as follows: On Target, Missed by a Mile, Barking up the Wrong Tree, and Good-Hearted Bumbler. Academics engaged in teaching and research could also learn from this classification.

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This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under Contract No. ED-99-CO-0013. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. ***Digests*** may be freely reproduced and are available at <http://ericacve.org/fulltext.asp>.

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